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JAMES ROOD DOOLITTLE OF WISCONSIN.

GLEANINGS FROM THE PRIVATE LETTERS AND DOCUMENTS OF
A SENATOR OF THE CIVIL WAR PERIOD.

Contributed by Duane Mowry of Milwaukee, Wis.

Judge James R. Doolittle was elected to the United States Senate by the Wisconsin Legislature in January, 1857, his term of service commencing the following March. He was re-elected in 1863 to succeed himself, serving the full period of two terms, from 1857 to 1869, twelve years.

Judge Doolittle's senatorial service included the troublous times preceding the Civil War, the entire Civil War period, and a portion of the period which was given over to the solution of the problems which were the outgrowth of the war between the states. He was the confidant and confidential adviser of two presidents, Lincoln and Johnson. He was the trusted friend of the anti-slavery movement. He was a lawyer of more than ordinary ability. He was a debater of acknowledged power. He was an orator of the very first quality. Naturally, such a character was much sought and he was much feared. It has been said of him that one time, when he was in the zenith of his power and glory, more persons had heard his voice than had heard the voice of any other living person. And the statement is doubtless true. He, himself, believed it to be literally true.

Senator Doolittle was a positive character. It was his delight to support a cause vigorously. And it was equally his pleasure to oppose a cause or a measure most vehemently. He never did things by halves. But his support or opposition of any measure would always have to have the approving conscience back of it. He did, or

failed to do, something, because, in his opinion, it was right to take that particular position or view. His official career was always controlled by this lofty and ennobling attitude of mind.

The private papers and correspondence go far to show that the foregoing observations are amply justified. He was much in evidence whenever important public questions were under consideration. His advice was frequently sought by those in both high and low station. And it was his particular delight to be of assistance to the oppressed. Both Presidents Lincoln and Johnson regarded him as a very wise and safe counselor. And he was a trusted friend of both administrations.

Judge Doolittle's opposition to the extension of slavery was manifested early in his public life. Indeed, when a resident of Western New York, his pronounced anti-slavery views were well known. The following letter may have been received by him because of his well known attitude on the slavery question. His private papers do not explain that. Be that as it may, the letter is certainly interesting reading. The author of it died quite recently in Chicago. It follows:

Chicago, Jan. 30th, 1860.

Hon. J. R. Doolittle,
Washington, D. C.

Yours of the 28th is received. I do not know to what points my testimony would be useful. You know that I was the Secy of the N. K. Com. & had an accurate knowledge of all the operations of that committee, as well with reference to John Brown as to the general Kansas difficulties. Every thing that was used of money, clothing, or arms went through my hands.

I knew Brown during all the time. He had no connection with the committee. He would not have because we did not agree with him, or at least, he thought we would not, upon the course to be taken by the North.

I was present at New York in Jan. 1857, when he asked for the arms (200 Sharps rifles), and opposed his having them unless he would pledge himself not to use them in aggressive movements. The committee would not grant him, or any person, aid from its funds for any purpose but to defend the settlers of Kansas. This was the whole policy of the Committee. I know that Brown had no sympathy with the Republican party, and although he considered the Committee more favorable to his line of policy than the Republican party, he regarded the committee so far from the right that (he) would not entrust any of his designs to them.

He has said that no one, except, perhaps, one person, knew his purposes or his plans of operations.

In all his intercourse with the committee before Jan. 1857, he put himself in the light of an outsider, & only asked aid as a sufferer in common with the other free state settlers.

When these arms were asked, it was believed by the committee that all he intended to do was to form a company of the residents of Kansas, who should be in readiness to repel any invasion that might be made by Missouri. The only difference in the committee was whether the difficulty was not over, and such a precaution was unnecessary. Even in that aspect the committee hesitated to grant him the guns, & they were returned to the original purchaser, and by him loaned to Brown under the direction of the Mass. Central Com.

I have given you the view I take of what my testimony will amount to so far as relates to the committee's connection with Brown. I should, if put on the stand, give the details, which I think would show these facts.

I do not wish to come to Washington unless I am obliged to, or can do the cause of truth good. I do not wish a lie to go before the country. My business is pressing, & I cannot well leave. I would only come on a subpoena.

Yours, &c.,

H. B. HURD.

The foregoing letter is valuable as giving some light upon the actions of John Brown, and upon his policies and methods of procedure. Indeed, it shows that Brown found some of his most pronounced opponents among those who were most strongly identified with the anti-slavery cause. It is likely that there are some still living who can verify much that is stated in Mr. Hurd's letter.

There was a wide spread difference of opinion as to what should be the policy of the administration with reference to the conduct of war. It is well known that the great Lincoln was beset with all sorts of suggestions, practical and impractical, wild, visionary and inexpedient.

The following is an extract from a letter by one of President Lincoln's first cabinet ministers. It foreshadows the old warrior's feeling as the final blow at rebellion was being struck. It is decidedly characteristic.

Harrisburg, April, 10-65.

My dear Sir :

I have your notice * * * * Tell Miss Mary that the young people miss her much.

We have now the glorious news of Lee's surrender. The only fear I now have is that we will be over-generous to the rebels, forgetting how much blood they have spilled.

Remember us all to Mrs. Doolittle.

Truly yrs.,

SIMON CAMERON.

Hon. J. R. Doolittle,
&c., &c., &c.

The letter which follows indicates the esteem in which Judge Doolittle was held by the press of the Middle West. The author is, evidently, or was, at the time of its writing, a member of the editorial staff of the Chicago Tribune. It also is important as expressing the hope that the new president, Andrew Johnson, would not be disappointing. It is to be noted that it follows Lincoln's assassination only a few days.

Office of Daily Tribune,
Chicago, Apr. 19, 1865.

Hon. J. R. Doolittle.

My Dear Sir:

Your letter inclosing a copy of your address was rec'd this morning. We found it yesterday in the *Racine Journal* & published it in this morning's issue. It is capital & will tend to inspire great confidence in our new president. God bless and guide him.

Your Obt. Servt.,

WM. BROSS.

The following letter is from an eminent son of Illinois. It is political in its nature. Reference is made, no doubt, to the political mistakes of President Johnson. The "excursion" referred to had to deal with the "swinging around the circle" event of Mr. Johnson. It was well understood that Judge Browning and Senator Doolittle advised against the Johnson speaking tour. As they predicted, it made impossible Mr. Johnson's availability as a presidential candidate.

Washington, D. C., Oct. 13, 1866.

My Dear Senator:

Your interesting letter of the 7th inst. was duly received.

In the pressure of public affairs, and the continual demands which they make upon my time, I am able to do little more than acknowledge its receipt.

The elections have gone against us, but I am neither disappointed nor disheartened. I trust our friends will not be cast down by these disasters. Let us meet them bravely, and with good heart, and we will ultimately triumph. We are not struggling for the triumph of a party, but for the success of principles which are inherently and fundamentally right and just, and which must, ultimately, win acceptance.

Had we acted wisely we could have achieved a victory this fall—but folly, not wisdom, ruled all our movements after the Philadelphia Convention.

That placed us upon the vantage ground which we might have kept if we would, but we blasted all its buds and blossoms of promise before they had time to mature into fruit. The efforts made in some parts of the country to use the Convention merely as a lever to lift the old democratic party again into power was disastrous, and the indiscretions you so properly and forcibly allude to were still more so.

But as we could neither prevent nor control these things we are, of course, not responsible for them.

The night before the excursion to Chicago I went in person, and begged that no speeches be made, except in acknowledgment of honors paid and kindnesses shown. Had this advice been heeded the trip west would have brought us victory everywhere that we have suffered defeat. But there is no use in grieving over the escaped deer. We'll pick our flints and try it again; trusting that our friends, who have been thus taught in the school of adversity may be wiser in the future.

I have not time to add another word, except to beg that you will present my kind regards to Mrs. Doolittle and the young ladies. Always glad to hear from you.

Truly yours,

O. H. BROWNING.

A dispatch from Burleigh this moment received informs me he is elected by a two thirds vote.

Hon. J. R. Doolittle,

Racine, Wis.

The foregoing political letter is interesting, because, as the date clearly shows, it was at a period when Congress was at sixes and sevens with President Johnson, and there was a new, but none the less certain, alignment of political parties going on, due, largely to the difference of views with reference to the reconstruction policy of the administration. Mr. Browning was, for a time, a member of President Johnson's cabinet, and he was highly esteemed by his colleagues of the civil war period.

A copy of a rough draft of a letter in Judge Doolittle's own handwriting follows. It was written from Chicago in 1873 where Judge Doolittle had established himself in the practice of the law. It is in some sense a pen-picture of Mr. Lincoln and is worthy of preservation on your pages. It was sent to Mr. Jesse W. Fell, of Bloomington, Ill. Here it is:

Dear Sir: I accept with pleasure your autobiography of Lincoln. The engraving gives as true an expression of his features while in repose, as I have ever seen. No engraving could do justice to them when animated in conversation.

The *fac simile* of his handwriting is perfect; while the style and contents of his letter show that same vividness of recollection, and clearness of thought, which placed him, among the great men of our day. They reveal, also, that simplicity, conciseness and quaintness of statement, mingled with playful good humor, which, in private conversation, charmed all who heard him, but did not conceal from those who knew him well, that undertone of sadness, which touched, and, often, ruled his inner life.

To me, and I doubt not to thousands, your work speaks a volume. How we would prize it, if we could have with it such an autobiography of him whose birthday anniversary occurs today!*

With many thanks for your kindness, I remain,
Truly yours,

J. R. DOOLITTLE.

*George Washington.